WHIRRAKEE

September 2006 Vol. 27 No. 8

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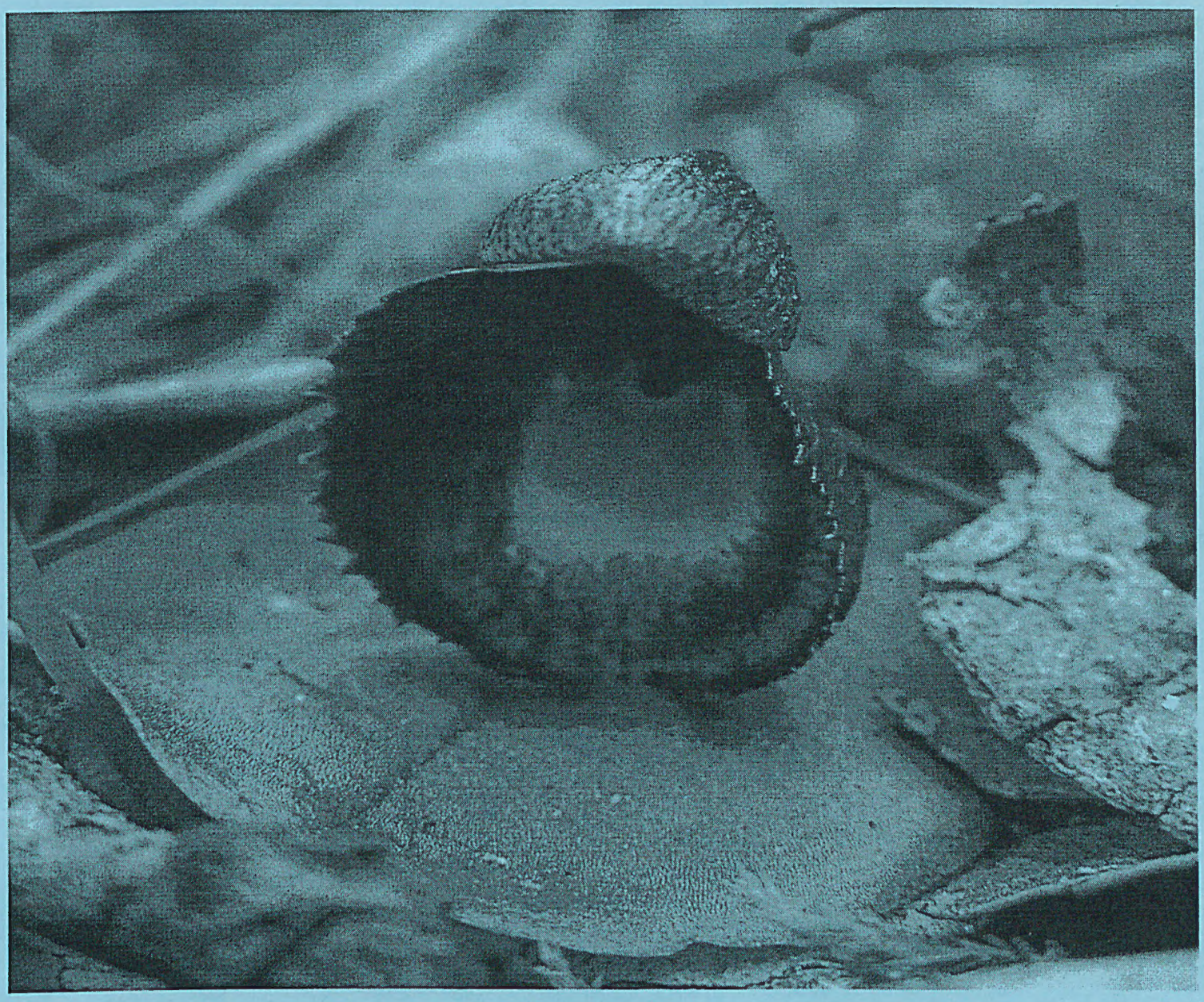


MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2005 - 2006

President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Senior Vice President	Stuart Fraser	12 Bambara Close, Bendigo	
Junior Vice President	Anne Bridley		5449 3479.
Secretary	Anne Bridley		5449 3479.
Minute Secretary	Jan Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
	(with Peter Ellis as assistant)		
Treasurer	Stuart Fraser		
Membership Officer	Kate Lottkowitz	80 Piccaninny Rd, RSD Strathfieldsaye	5439 3157
Excursion organiser	Richard Goonan		0423418815
Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
	(an assistant's position for the syllabus organiser is still vacant)		
Librarian	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Darren White)		0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo	5443 2797
		e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Ben Goonan, Richard Goonan, Bill Holsworth, Rob Moors, Rod Orr, Bob Ruddick, Darren White.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 27, No. 8, September 2006

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short Notices		3
September Excursion	Richard Goonan	3
June, July and August excursion reports	Richard Goonan	4
August General Meeting, speaker: Martin Scuffin, 'The Hawk and the Hunter'	Sabine Wilkens	5
Special book offer for members		6
Another raptor	Allan Pearce/Tom Burton	8
Subscription form for 2006/2007 BFNC membership		8

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note:
This is the September issue and it is a bit surprising that there are two empty pages at the back. Hopefully members will, therefore, send me all their exciting spring observations and articles in October…
We are coming up for the Annual General Meeting of the Club this month, and I must just reiterate the last editorial. Please consider standing for one or more of the positions, as they are all being vacated. Also, subscriptions are due in September too. Please use the slip on page 8 and pay at the AGM, or send in your money to the treasurer as soon as you can. This is one of those things that is easily forgotten. See you all on the 13th September.

Front Page Photograph – The photo of this amazing orchid was taken at the last club excursion to Kooyoora State Park. It is *Corybas incurvus* or Slaty Helmet Orchid. 'Corybas' means helmet. Rod Orr, in 'The Orchids of Bendigo (page 26), states how tiny they are and how difficult to spot. It is a mental challenge to imagine how such a highly specialised flower form evolved from the 'standard' flower morphology of regular sepals, petals, stamens and carpels.

Short Notices

.....Upcoming September Excursion.....

By Richard Goonan

Excursion September 16 – Roadside Conservation with Ben Goonan
9.00am – 4.00pm $10.00
For further information call: 0423418815

Ben has been surveying the roadsides of the North Central region over the previous eighteen months, developing a detailed understanding of the issues surrounding remnant vegetation on roadsides. Roadside vegetation provides an invaluable source of information regarding species distribution and associations. Providing an important resource for conservation, some of the last remaining examples of the former vegetation that once covered the landscape, are found along sections of the 44,500km of roadside in the north central area.

Join us on a tour of some of the region's roadsides, which you may have travelled many time,s not realizing you were driving past a rare or threatened species or vegetation community. The day will include stopping for short walks to examine some of the many different vegetation types such as Creekline Grassy Woodland communities, and other areas of interest such as small reserves and areas with large old trees.
Bring your lunch, hat, warm clothes and jacket.

Two fundraising activities for the Wildlife Rescue and Information Network (WRIN)

1. Cheese-making
Saturday 23rd September 10am – 4pm
Cost: $ 35.00. (please pay before 16th September)
Where: Field Naturalists Club room
There will be a choice of fetta, gouda, Wensleydale or parmesan. All ingredients and lunch supplied. Places are limited.
Contact: Jenny (54396287)

2. Annual Garage Sale
Saturday 28th October
Where: 127 Havlin Street East
The sale will commence at 8am, please come and support WRIN.

Community Survey
(from 'The Advertiser' 9/8/2006)

Author: David Jones, mayor

I encourage residents to complete a community survey which will help the City of Greater Bendigo prepare a new Natural Environment Strategy.

The survey can be completed online at www.bendigo.vic.gov.au or a copy can be sent to you if you phone council on 54346000, and **must be completed by August 14**.

The quality and quantity of input is vital to the success of the new Natural Environment Strategy, as it can generate new ways to better protect and enhance our natural environment.

Supplement to Native Trees and Shrubs of South-Eastern Australia by Leon Costermans.

This is available on CD-ROM and will bring you up to date with the hundreds of name changes and newly described species since the book was published in 1981.
It is available for $25 from the VNPA ($21.50 VNPA members).
For order form, contact Anne Bridley (544 94379) or the VNPA (93475188)

Fire Operations Plan
For those interested in the new fire operations plan, it is available for viewing at the Epsom DSE office.

June, July and August Excursion Reports

by Richard Goonan

The **June excursion** was a spectacular day (unfortunately) as another large, slow and dry, high pressure system passed over central Victoria. Our journey for the day, looking at different landscapes of central Victoria started with One Tree Hill. After casting a wide view from the tower, we took a short walk along the burnt ridge to the south, considering and observing the influence of fire on vegetation and its role in local forest management. The impact of off-track mountain-bike riding was noted and the considerable vegetation disturbance and potential for erosion on the steep slopes seems to be at odds with the areas natural values.

Our next walk was to the summit of Mt Gaspard. Providing views of the region and several of the dominant landforms, the walk stimulated opportunity for a wide range of discussion. Looking south to the volcanic plains and scoria cones of western Victoria, east to the Mt Alexander Granite, north over the Ravenswood granite across to the metamorphic Big Hill Range and west across the low sedimentary hills of Shelbourne to the Loddon Riverine Plain, there is a diversity of landscapes and associated vegetation across central Victoria.

The afternoon took in a trip out to the Loddon River, across the undulating volcanic plain originating from Bald Hill. After a brief stop and afternoon tea on the river, we followed Yorkshire Road over the northern section of the volcanic plain, observing responses of the native grass to a recent fire.

July was finally a wet and cold day (one of the few we have had), and a perfect day for a fungi excursion to Blackwood with the FNCV. Mat and I were the only brave souls to gear up in full wet weather attire and head up to the central upland forests. Meeting the group at 10.30 we were soon on the hunt.

Although the cold and dry June had shortened the fungi season, there were may species found (30 or so) within a short distance of the car. Another interesting aspect of the day was the opportunity to return to the area we visited for our March walk, and it certainly was a contrast.

August – Another large, slow moving and dry high pressure system provided pleasant conditions for our excursion to Kooyoora. Our walk took in the Long Rock track, leaving from the camping area, and returning via a steep short cut to the car park and a well-earned lunch and cup of tea.

Stopping along the track regularly to identify birds and take in the views from several lookout points, the walk was a leisurely stroll. In contrast to summer months the green mosses and soft lichens growing on the Long Rock spur and other wet soaks provide an interesting array of texture and pattern. The closer you look the more that is seen, it would easily be possible to focus an excursion on just the moss-beds along the track – perhaps next year?

Toward the top of the spur a thick patch of Mosquito Orchids (*Cyrtostylis reniformis*), with small flower spikes, and basal leaves thought to be Spider orchids were seen. As the track leaves the Long Rock spur a large patch of Helmet Orchids were found, later identified as *Corybas incurvus* or Slaty Helmet Orchid (pictured on the front cover).

Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia or Rock Fern is reasonably wide spread through the Kooyoora area. In contrast, the beautiful pink flowers and strongly aromatic leaf of *Zieria aspalathoides*, Whorled Zieria, is a rare sight, growing amongst granite outcrops.

Following lunch, we were taken along a back road from Kingower to Inglwood by Keith Graham to look at the Mallee vegetation which is prominent around Inglewood. Providing a contrast to the Woodland of the Granitic hills and the nearby Box/Ironbark environments, the Mallee scrub has a diverse understorey component. Several patches of Greenhood basal leaves, 'one of the rufa' group spp; were found at the last site, similar to those found during our May excursion to the Wellsford.

August General Meeting
Speaker: Martin Scuffins: 'The Hawk and the Hunter'

By Sabine Wilkens

Martin Scuffins has been interested in birds of prey since the age of four. By the age of six, Martin had bedtime reading from a book on the topic every night of the week, and, putting what he had learnt about being a falconer into practice, Martin trained his first bird, a Muscovy Duck, when he was eight.

From there, he did not go straight into caring for injured birds but made a few detours. He studied rats and then lived in Indonesia for a while.

Today, Martin lives in Ballarat and runs the Central Highlands Birds of Prey Shelter during the day. At other times of the day, he supports the work of the shelter with his other talents as an artist and musician.

Birds of prey, or raptors, are characterised by their hooked beak and their very sharp talons which enable them to seize and carry away their prey. Other birds eat meat as well (e.g. kookaburra, tawny frogmouth) but these species do not have talons.

Female raptors are generally larger than males. Their larger size may help females to bring down larger prey when feeding a young family.

The order Falconiformes has two families, which differ in morphology and behaviour. The family Accipitridae contains the hawks and eagles. These have a single curved beak, simple nostrils, light eyes and they are effective nest builders. In addition members of this family shoot their faeces backwards with some speed. From this point of view, it is quite safe to stand underneath a hawk or an eagle when observing them.

The family Falconidae contains the falcons and kestrels. They have a tooth-like structure on the outside of their beak, which helps them tear up meat and hold down prey (most prey consist of birds). Their nostrils have an in-built baffle, something that might be advantageous for high-velocity flying. They have dark eyes and often dark feathers under the eye. Their nests are often a messy assemblage on a rock or a building ledge or a hollow in a tree. As opposed to the other raptor family, hawks and kestrels drop their faeces straight down from their perch.

It is well known that raptors have fantastic eyesight. A Peregrine Falcon can see about three times better than a human. They can distinguish a rabbit from its background from 1500 m away (people often have trouble seeing rabbits when they are only metres way).

Other common features of birds of prey is their beautiful plumage and their feathers have been revered in many different cultures over time. Amongst some American Indians, for example, feathers have to be earned by acts of altruism. How wonderful!

There is much mythology associated with birds of prey and many cultures have had a long association with these birds. There are records from 5000 years ago that falcons were given to Chinese princes as a gift, and the sport of falconry (using raptors to hunt animals) is dated back to at least 1700 B.C. Falconry spread from Asia and became popular in Europe in the middle ages. Poor people could keep kestrels but eagles were reserved for kings only. Goshawks and Peregrine Falcons were allowed for slightly more well-off citizens, so there was a hierarchy according to the degree of 'nobleness' of a raptor.

The English language has many terms derived form the language of falconry and Shakespeare's writing is also full of falconers terminology. Martin promptly recited a wonderful poem when he came to this part of the talk.

Falconry continued to be practiced through the 18th and 19th century but lost its popularity with the invention of guns.

When Australia was settled by Europeans, the tables soon turned on these 'noble birds', when they were seen as competitors to farming activities. Farming in Australia always had priority over conservation, and up the 1960s, there was a bounty on the heads of Wedge-tailed Eagles.

Although most people do not think of birds of prey as their enemies any more, our way of living still impacts on the lives of raptors in many negative ways. Poisoning sparrows and pigeons can cause mortality amongst those town dwelling raptors that exclusively feed on these introduced birds. Barbed wires and telephone cables cause injuries in birds so bad, that most victims that are brought to Martin's shelter have to be euthanised immediately. Other injuries are caused by cars and domestic animals.

A small number of birds that heal from injuries, but are not well enough to fend for themselves, are allowed to be kept in the shelter for educational purposes. Overall injured birds have a low percentage of successful recovery and Martin told us that he used to try a lot harder to save birds than he does now. (He put this down to becoming 'harder' but he was queried by Brenda Cheers who is another dedicated wildlife carer, as being rather 'more realistic' than harder', and more compassionate towards the animals in the long run anyway.) However, naturally there are moral dilemmas galore in a job like this.

Thirty days is the average length of stay at the shelter. Young birds that have 100% recovered from a trauma and injury, are often 'soft-released'. This means that food is left out for them. They take this less and less often and eventually do not return.

Sometimes birds come in to the shelter that have been un-necessarily and inappropriately rescued. Perhaps they have been injured in the process or have been given the wrong food for some time.

Lastly, Martin mentioned another human factor in the long list of difficulties faced by raptors. This is, of course, habitat destruction. People often removed dead trees that make perfect roosts and nesting holes. One of the solutions is to protect private land under the 'Land for Wildlife' scheme, or place covenants on the land

(this was a nice touch, as we only just had Elvyne Hogan speak to us about 'Trust for Nature' activities in the region the month before). Martin spoke very highly of the organisation.

I was sorry when the talk ended. It was a fantastic topic and was told with such knowledge and dedication that I was spell-bound the whole time.

Special Book Offer to Members
'Leaf Litter' by Rachel Tonkin

Editor's note:
Through the help of Frances Cincotta, Bill Holsworth was able to get a copy of this new book to the last general meeting where it received much admiration.
As a result, Bill has ordered a number of copies to sell to members at the special price of 25 dollars. Please let Bill know f you are interested in purchasing a copy.
Below is some information about the book supplied by the publishers.

'In one small patch of leaf litter beneath one tree, this secret world is changing day by day, as seeds turn into plants, grubs hatch from eggs and animals grow big enough to leave their mothers. The more you look the more amazing things you will find.'

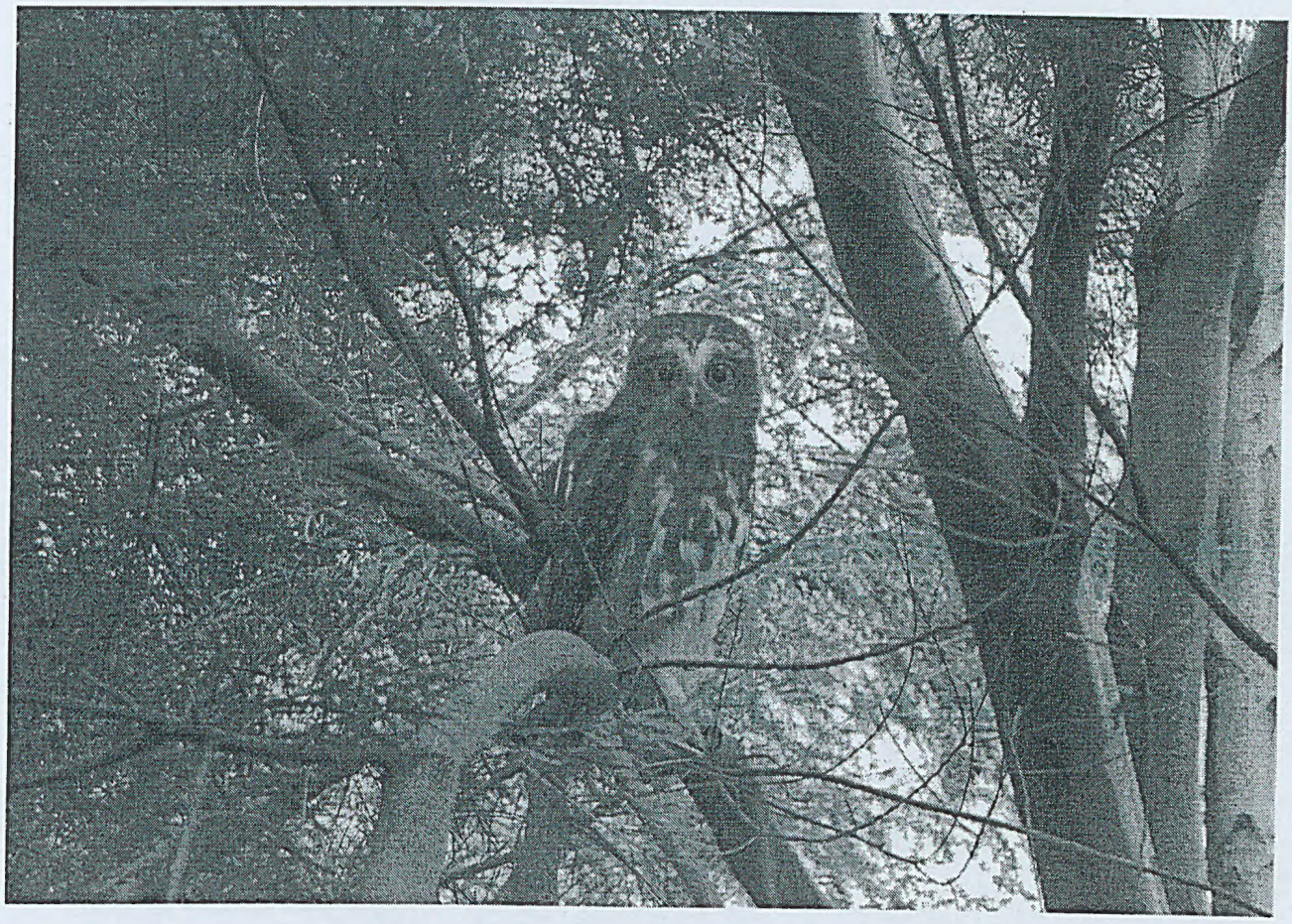
'In our fast-paced world it is difficult to find time to stop and smell the roses; Rachel Tonkin's book, packed with exquisitely detailed images and informative prose, does just that. *Leaf Litter* follows a patch of the distinctive Australian bush as it changes throughout the seasons. From the soft autumn rains to the scorching summer heat, Tonkin accurately depicts the activity in the bush. Children of all ages will be delighted as Australian animals, insects, and plants participate in the circle of life. With flaps to lift on every page, a 'Things to Find' section in the back, and a glossary of terms, *Leaf Litter* promises to provide educational entertainment for hours. An excellent introduction to the intricate and complex relationships that exist in our natural world, *Leaf Litter* is the perfect book for parents and children to share at story-time.

About Rachel Tonkin:
Rachel Tonkin has illustrated over fifty children's books, including *Papa and the Olden Days* (a Children's Book Council Honour Book) and *Lucy and the Whale* (shortlisted for the Wilderness Society Environment Award for Children's Literature). She has also written and illustrated several titles including *What Was the War Like, Grandma?* And *Grandpa's Stories* (both shortlisted for the Children's Book Council's Eve Pownall Information Award), *When I was a Kid* (shortlisted for a NSW Premier's Award) and, most recently, *To the Goldfields!* '

Another raptor

This owl (yes, what is it???) was photographed by Allan Pearson right in front of his place of work, Media Services at LaTrobe University. It was seen a few months ago, in the morning (just a bit too long ago to remember the exact size of the bird).

Owls are raptors too, but it appears owls are not closely related to hawks, but there is a real though distant relationship with the swifts and hummingbirds (p. 334).
(From Tom Burton via Simpson, K & Day, N 1993: Field Guide to the Birds of Australia 4th ed. Viking O' Neil, Ringwood.)



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Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club Inc. Membership Subscriptions 2006 - 2007

Members are reminded that subscriptions are due on September 1, 2006.
Subscription rates are shown below (they include GST). Please tick the appropriate box which describes your subscription and send the correct amount to:
The Treasurer, Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club Inc. PO Box 396, Bendigo, Vic. 3552.

Single $34	☐	Concessions:	Single $28.50	☐
Family $40	☐		Family $34	☐
Whirrakee subscription only $34	☐			

Diary
The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings
Wednesday, September 13 7.30pm
Annual General Meeting. Also, Magale Wright will talk to us about her PhD project which involves the study of suitable conditions for the germination of rare orchids. Two of these are orchids from the Bendigo district.

Wednesday, October 11 7.30pm
Frances Cincotta will run a combined talk/workshop about identifying native peas.

Excursions
September 16 – Roadside Conservation with Ben Goonan
9.00am – 4.00pm , $10.00
For further information see page 3 or call: 0423418815
And…bring you lunch and warm clothes.

Fauna Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Wednesday, September 27 7.30pm
Mystery topics or topics of interest will be discussed

Wednesday, October 25 7.30pm
Glenise Moors will discuss ***Birds and why it is so!*** For example, What is the practical function of birds plumage and other distinguishing features?
All welcome.

Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.
See page 3 of this issue for two WRIN fund-raising activities.

Spring in the Bendigo Bush
Anthony Sheean and Jane Cleary are still looking for plant and bird experts to accompany a walk along the O'Keefe Trail on September 30. Please contact either of them of you can assist.

Mid Murray Field Naturalists September Campout Saturday 23rd September to Saturday 1st October at Big Billy Bore campground, Big Desert.
Leader David Thompson ph 50302254.

South East Australian Naturalists Association Spring Camp
13th-15th October.
Hosted by Maryborough Field Naturalists Club. Registration by 30 August.
Further information, Eileen Courtney ph 54612249 Brian Johns 54612755.

FNCV 2006 Biodiversity Symposium: Invasive Species
Sunday 10 September 2006 at FNCV clubroom, Blackburn
Special guest speaker: Andrew Hingston (University of Tasmania) on "The potential impact of the bumblebee on the Australian mainland"
Registration form: Anne Bridley or FNCV, Locked Bag 3, Blackburn 3130